

WASHINGTON, D.C. –Today, Congresswoman Gwen Moore, along with 35 original co-sponsors, introduced legislation that would increase post-secondary educational opportunities for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients. Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

TANF, a program created by the 1996 restructuring of the nation's welfare program, places limits on receipt of benefits and requires recipients to work. However, currently TANF only allows recipients to learn in post-secondary vocational education programs for up to 12 months as an approved work activity. The proposed legislation would allow them to participate in post-secondary vocational educational training for up to 24 months as approved work activity.

"Limiting educational opportunities and training for heads of struggling families raises a number of concerns, not the least of which is whether these individuals may eventually be forced into lower paying, short-term employment that will force them back to public assistance because they are unable to support themselves and their families," said Rep. Moore. "We need to ensure that those individuals seeking to better themselves through education and training are truly afforded that opportunity. It is a winning situation for everyone."

Study after study indicates that short-term training programs raise the income of workers only marginally, while completion of at least a two-year associate degree has greater potential of breaking the cycle of poverty for recipients of public assistance. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median earnings of adults with an associate degree are 30 percent higher than adults with only a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. Moreover, in 2004 a report by the Kentucky Legislative Research Commission found that TANF recipients who received more than one year of post-secondary education or training had the best outcomes among TANF recipients participating in a range of activities.

"TANF reform is desperately needed," said Elizabeth Lower-Basch, a senior policy analyst with the Center for Law and Social Policy. "We have millions of TANF recipients who have a strong desire to better themselves through educational opportunities but there are legal constraints preventing them from doing so. Hopefully, enactment of this legislation will finally end this injustice."

If passed, this legislation would give states the flexibility that they need to improve the economic

status of families across America. Additionally, TANF recipients would be able to further their education and receive gainful employment to aid in becoming productive and successful members of the workforce.

“In these trying times, having access education is an important key to increasing the quality of life for millions of families. I applaud and support anyone who is trying to get an education so they can provide for their family,” said Rep. Moore. “The goal of this legislation is to empower people struggling at the bottom of the economy to take control over their lives, so we should be doing all we can to make certain they have access to the tools they may need to do that.”

###